

FORCED ENTERTAINMENT

COLD SWEAT

**"Cold Sweat is nothing less than
a manifest act of resistance."**

Un Fauteuil Pour L'Orchestre, Paris

Cold Sweat is a Forced Entertainment theatre work created in 2025, with original texts and sound from the group's artistic director Tim Etchells.

Layering music loops with AI-generated voices, we are in play of some kind. Or a TV soap. Fragments of a drama bound together by a mood of emotional and physical overload.

The figures onstage are channelling confusion, struggling to articulate desires, dreams and uncertainties, looping their way through speeches and statements that shift between revelation and cliché. Digging deeper into the lip-syncing mode they established in the 2024 production

Signal to Noise the group's virtuoso performers map their bodies to the strange rhythms and tonalities that the nonhuman AI voices produce. The result is an absurd, comical, unsettling and poetic contemporary theatre.

Cold Sweat is a Forced Entertainment Production.

Co-produced by KONTRÄR, Stockholm, Sweden and created with the support of La Commune, Centre dramatique national d'Aubervilliers and La Menagerie De Verre, France.

Conceived and devised by the company

Director Tim Etchells

Devised with and performed by
Richard Lowdon, Claire Marshall
and Terry O'Connor

Text, composition and sound design
Tim Etchells

Stage Design Richard Lowdon

Lighting Design Jim Harrison

Production Management Jim Harrison

Producer Eileen Evans

Forced Entertainment is an ensemble of six artists founded in 1984 and based in Sheffield. Touring and presenting their ground-breaking provocative performances across the UK and further afield, the group have sustained a unique collaborative practice for forty years.

The work explores and often explodes the conventions of genre, narrative and theatre itself drawing influence not just from drama but from dance, performance art, music culture and popular forms such as cabaret and stand-up. The group operates at different scales, shifting from intimate two-performer works focused on text, to spectacular productions with large numbers of people onstage.

Exciting, challenging, entertaining and questioning, Forced Entertainment has been a key player in the development of a truly contemporary theatre language, and is recognised as a world leader in the field of contemporary performance practice - contributing enormously to the growth and development of British theatre, the debate about the form itself, as well as influencing several generations of audiences and artists who have been inspired by the work. contemporary theatre language, inspiring generations of UK and international theatre makers.

Forced Entertainment Artistic Team

Robin Arthur, Tim Etchells (Artistic Director), Richard Lowdon (Designer), Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor.

Forced Entertainment Management Team

Deborah Chadbourn & Eileen Evans (Co-Executive Directors), Jim Harrison (Production Manager & Touring Producer).

Marketing Caroline Griffin Consultancy

Forced Entertainment is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.



Supported using public funding by

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Strange masks in audio form

A note on Forced Entertainment's *Cold Sweat*

We are somewhere in the aftermath of a party perhaps, the ground strewn with empty bottles, three last misfits at the table clutching what remains of the booze, talking acrimoniously, laughing, accusing each other of one thing or another, hardly making much sense. The air crackles with music, electronic sounds, glitches, slithers of tune.

This is the world of *Cold Sweat*, the second project we've made in which Forced Entertainment's performers lip sync to my original texts, voiced by AI text-to-speech software. We've long been gripped by the vexed relationship between lived experience and the phantasms of mass culture, and the group's collaboration since 1984 sees us coming back repeatedly to the question of quite how those things are intertwined, how free or trapped we might be in relation to the capitalist dreams, images and narratives that surround us. In *Cold Sweat*, as in its predecessor *Signal to Noise*, the collision of the unreal computer-made voices with the real, highly present bodies and impulses of the performers onstage makes for a dynamic uncanny effect. The voices are grotesque masks in audio form, strange and larger than life; through the piece, the performers bend their presences in that direction, adopting a cacophonous mix of wigs and costumes as if in this way they might somehow better fit the part.

It's a question of fitting in and of measuring distance, negotiating our varying degrees of entanglement with the fractured, computerised world in which we're all steeped. Meanwhile, as the action progresses it's increasingly unclear if the figures onstage are real, or if they're mere electronic phantoms, ghosts summoned fleetingly by the warps and bends of the audio. The voices themselves are often written 'wrong' in all kinds of deliberate ways – punctuation in weird places or where it is not needed, words jumbled and sometimes slurred, sentences cut short or else locked in repetitions that the AI speakers don't quite seem to notice. With an effect that's unsettling, comic at times, the voices continue to deliver the texts with their native efficiency, despite these obstacles, as if 'everything is in perfect order'. The figures rail at each other, make as if to party, collapse into melancholy – always like, and-yet-not-quite-like, humans.

Cold Sweat comes out of the period in 2025 and 2026 where AI has suddenly sprouted everywhere like electronic knotweed, and where social media and other channels are flooded with presences distantly akin to those we summon onstage – digital ghosts, almost-humans, lifelike but not really like life at all. It's a time where the question of what it is to be alive, what it is to be human, what it is to exist in relation to others, in relation to a society and in relation to a planet, is extremely pressing and suddenly perhaps, harder to figure than ever before. Imaginatively, and in the spaces of culture and politics, we're jostled for space by our own runaway algorithmic creations.

There are other things in the mix of course. *Cold Sweat* echoes some kind of drama, a toxic family or friendship tangle – a B-movie or play perhaps, with melodramatic interactions, asides to audience etc., however torn into pieces and then reassembled the drama might seem. In this sense too, this new work takes us deeper into a project that has long been central for the company – the rag-picking principle of making new things from old. As *Cold Sweat* progresses, we are taken to a place where theatre and narrative, as well as language itself are breaking down, cracking open. There's a sense often that the fragmentary dialogue of the piece gives way to listing or cataloguing, swathes of text spewing out from the cracks -- as if the Index or Table of Contents for the world were being randomly invoked, a brutal poetry in its unravelling. Something is bursting, the voices slipping and spilling out from somewhere and onto the stage; *this chair, that knife, this poison, this rigged race, that kitchen clock, that faint shadow, this bloodshed, this carpark, that Eau d'Cologne.*

We hope you enjoy the show.

Tim Etchells, 2026.

